

Distance Learning for High School Social Studies Day

Instructions: Read the following article and then complete the questions and reflection at the end.

1 **Memorials and Monuments** from facinghistory.org

2 How do we keep history alive in our communities? Which events and people are worth remembering, and
3 why? Memorials and monuments reflect, in part, the ways that communities and individuals have answered
4 these questions...

5 ...We use the terms *monuments* and *memorials* more or less interchangeably. Some people distinguish
6 between the two, saying that memorials are a response to loss and death and that monuments are more
7 commemorative and celebratory in nature. However, when considering traditional memorials and
8 monuments, there are so many exceptions to these definitions that here we will use the terms more loosely.

9 Memorials raise complex questions about which history we choose to remember. If a memorial cannot tell
10 the whole story, then what part of the story, or whose story, does it tell? Whose memories, whose point of
11 view, and whose values and perspectives will be represented? Memorials must also respond to the question,
12 “Why should we remember?” Writing of memorials in Germany, Ian Buruma distinguishes between a
13 *Denkmal*, a monument built to glorify a leader, an event, or the nation as a whole, and a *Mahnmal*, a
14 “monument of warning.” Holocaust memorials, he says, are “monuments of warning.”

15 Memorial makers must also decide how to express complex ideas in the visual vocabulary available to them.
16 Shape, mass, material, imagery, location, and perhaps some words, names, or dates can communicate a
17 memorial’s message. Legal scholar Martha Minow asks,

18 *Should such memorials be literal or abstract? Should they honor the dead or disturb the very*
19 *possibility of honor in atrocity? Should they be monumental, or instead disavow the monumental*
20 *image, itself so associated with Nazism? Preserve memories or challenge as pretense the notion that*
21 *memories ever exist outside the process of constructing them?*

22 Some observers wonder if memorials might have unintended consequences, undermining the memories that
23 they are meant to preserve. Critic James Young has said of memorials, “It’s a big rock telling people what to
24 think; it’s a big form that pretends to have a meaning, that sustains itself for eternity, that never changes over
25 time, never evolves—it fixes history, it embalms or somehow stultifies it.” Young has suggested that
26 memorials might actually let viewers become more passive and forgetful, because they “do our memory
27 work for us.”

28 Can monuments suggest closure when none exists and consequently insulate us from history or anesthetize
29 us rather than engaging and challenging us?

- A. How does this article differentiate between monument and memorial? Has your understanding of these two terms changed from the previous lesson?
- B. Explain three challenges that arise when developing monuments and memorials?
- C. Reflect on a time when you have visited a monument or have a conversation with someone in your home about a time when they visited a monument. (If necessary use one of the images from the previous activity). Describe the monument. How did seeing the monument make you feel? Did you agree with how the monument or memorial portrayed the person or event? Why or why not?